

By JEFF POWELL

WHEN we lowered our glasses after toasting Non-League Day in the FA Cup, it was to survey the pathetic sight of football's ruling class sitting in the gutter with a bloody nose.

For the message punched home on Saturday by Wimbledon, Altrincham, Wycombe, Leatherhead and Stafford is that there is no longer a blue-blooded aristocracy in English Soccer.

The crowded saloon bar scuffle for this season's First Division title had already planted doubts about the quality of our Soccer.

The top clubs argued it was a levelling up of standards, that the spreading quality of players and team technique was congesting the title race. After Saturday, go tell that to the Puddlemarsh Thursday League.

It was not so much that Wimbledon won at Burnley; that Altrincham went so close to winning at Everton; that Wycombe drew with Middlesbrough . . . it was the way they did it which proved that those standards have been seriously eroded.

In the game I saw, Wycombe should have beaten Middlesbrough by at least a couple of goals.

There was a time when First

## NO EXCUSES FOR A CUP OF RUBBISH

Division giants—like Manchester United, Spurs and Wolves—went away in the third round of the Cup and put on a show, waved the flag for football, gave the little clubs a hiding . . . and a rewarding 90-minute glimpse of how the game should be played.

Now the professionals have disappeared so far up their own egos,

got so thoroughly lost in their tactical labyrinth that the mortar board is on the other head.

Middlesbrough went to Wycombe with two strikers, a packed defence, a monotonous procession of long balls and a manager, Jack Charlton, who had the effrontery to say immediately afterwards: 'What do you mean, what went wrong? We've got a good result, 0-0, and a replay up at our place.'

Later, hearing Charlton pin the blame on Wycombe's sloping pitch, I wanted to make him life president of the Flat Earth Society . . . and give Wycombe a free pass to a fourth round tie with Sunderland.

There was no excuse for the

results or for the rubbish played by some of the First Division establishment.

Wycombe, Wimbledon and the rest offered on Saturday a reason for rejoicing among those eager to teach a lesson to those well-paid prima donnas who are taking the fun out of top football.

We must now hope that they learn that lesson quickly. The League Cup has already thrown up four semi-finalists from outside the First Division.

If, in the fourth round of the FA Cup, Wimbledon wallop Leeds and Leatherhead thrash Leicester, the public will be laughing at top football . . . not going to watch it.